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TRANSPORTATION

House Leaders Reiterate Opposition To Increase In Gas Tax

House leadership Wednesday reiterated its opposition to Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Young's plan to increase the gas tax, indicating that it remains the position of leadership and the White House that there will be no increase in taxes to pay for Young's ambitious transportation funding proposal, House Republicans said.

During the first of several planned leadership meetings on infrastructure spending, Young, House Speaker Hastert, Majority Leader DeLay, Budget Chairman Nussle and Ways and Means Chairman Thomas discussed a host of alternatives for securing more highway and transit funding, although the gas tax hike was not on the table during those discussions, according to Nussle.

Young refused to discuss details of the meeting, but Nussle told [CongressDaily](#) that leadership reiterated opposition by DeLay and the Bush administration to a gas tax increase, and instead focused on alternative measures to boost spending.

However, Nussle acknowledged that it is unclear how much funding can be squeezed out of existing sources. "It's hard to tell today what the end result is going to be. There's a lot of work to be done," Nussle said.

One option discussed during the meeting would involve ensuring the entire tax on gasoline that includes ethanol is returned to the Highway Trust Fund. Currently, 2.5 cents of that revenue goes into general revenues, and Nussle estimated that returning that money to the fund would result in \$8 billion over 10 years.

Likewise, DeLay said while leadership and Young are no closer to finding a solution to the funding debate, he is willing to listen to any proposal Young can develop in order to boost funding this year. "We're trying to find a way on how to have him write a bill," DeLay said.

Although transportation observers were unfamiliar with the details of the meeting, they did say Wednesday's meeting appears to represent the most significant expression to date of leadership's opposition to Young's plan.

While DeLay has been adamant in his opposition to an increase in the gas tax -- including a Young proposal to adjust it for inflation -- these sources said leadership has never explicitly taken the idea off the table. Whether leadership's position will force Young to drop his efforts to build support for a gas tax increase is unclear.

Despite opposition from the White House, DeLay and conservative members of the House, Young has for months continued to lobby for the proposal, arguing that an increase is the only way to secure the necessary funding for highway and transit needs.

As it stands, the House has budgeted \$273 billion for over the six year life of the reauthorization bill -- more than \$100 billion less than the \$375 billion Young is calling for, and at least \$40 billion less than Senate transportation leaders are expected to push.

House Republicans say leadership is expected to meet with Young several more times in order to hammer out a final funding deal.